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LETTER DATED 28 SEPTEMBER 1998 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF GEORGIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

I have the honour to transmit herewith the text of the statement of the President of Georgia, Mr. Eduard Shevardnadze, on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the fall of Sukhumi in September 1993 (see annex).

May I request your kind assistance in having the text of the present statement circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Peter CHKHEIDZE
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex

[Original: Russian]

Statement by the President of Georgia, Eduard Shevardnadze, on the fall of Sukhumi five years ago

First of all, I pay tribute to the memory of those who fell in the fratricidal war and express sincere condolences to their families, relatives and near ones.

In addition, in relation to the fall of Sukhumi five years ago, I wish to emphasize a number of propositions:

1. The war in Abkhazia was triggered by irresponsible politicians, or more accurately intriguers. Documents and living witnesses confirm that the decision to redeploy the troops was taken solely in order to protect and maintain the security of the main railway lines and goods trains. Even had that been otherwise, a State has the right to move its armed forces about its territory as it deems necessary.

2. The group of leaders of the separatists, relying on forces from outside, including part of the regular army, conducted an ethnic cleansing of Georgians and other ethnic groups in Abkhazia. The declarations of the Budapest and Lisbon summit meetings of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe referred directly and unambiguously to the ethnic cleansing carried out in Abkhazia. The United Nations Security Council, too, does not deny the fact of ethnic cleansing of Georgians in that region of Georgia.

3. For five years, talks have been going on on a peaceful settlement of the conflict. The main foundations of a settlement were formulated in the Moscow agreement of 3 September 1992. Unfortunately, thanks to someone - for this was fully acceptable to the Abkhaz people and the Georgians, and to the northern Caucasus - the agreement became an empty piece of paper. I do not say this was a diplomatic victory or a defeat for the Georgians or the Abkhaz people, but, I repeat, the Moscow agreement was an ideal basis for reconciling the two peoples forever.

4. Many of the documents we have signed since 3 September 1992 are the result of difficult compromises and forced concessions by Georgia, which is severely affected by the internal conflicts and other domestic disorders.

5. Despite that, the negotiating process yielded certain results. Foremost among them was a direct dialogue between Georgians and Abkhaz. Perhaps the results were not all that tangible, but the main thing is that a dialogue was begun. Today, I am deeply convinced, the two peoples are convinced that we cannot do without one another, that the coexistence of the Georgian and Abkhaz peoples is, as it was for many centuries, the only means of not falling into the abyss, of travelling the long road of life and imprinting on world civilization the glory and merits of our two peoples.

6. People must return to their homes. Abkhazia must receive the highest status that is known in the practice of world federalism. Abkhazia must not

become a lever in the hands of unsavoury politicians for applying constant pressure to Georgia. That can bring nothing good. Harmony, friendship and kinship alone constitute the only way out of the situation.

7. Certainly, no one can doubt that the most serious and painful issue for me is Abkhazia. There is no form of death, other than the physical one, that I have not experienced since the start of 1990s.

Despite that, I am far from the temptation to take revenge, to seek to pay back in the same coin. I consider the reconciliation of the Georgian and Abkhaz peoples (just as of the Georgian and Ossetian peoples) to be the highest aim of my life, of the years that remain to me.

It was not easy for me to say that I am ready to fly to Sukhumi and there, despite a whole series of moral or psychological problems, to give a speech on the present and future fate of the two people. I say this because I am deeply convinced that without a settlement of the conflict, without our reconciliation, the ultimate confrontation will not come to an end. New generations are rising, and God knows how they will judge, what decisions they will take. I therefore call on the Georgian and, of course, the Abkhaz people to restore confidence, friendship and kinship, to live in accordance with the laws of the modern civilized world.

8. In Sukhumi now, they are no doubt celebrating a victory. In such a senseless war, in fratricidal confrontations, there are no winners and no losers. My Abkhaz brothers, surely no-one can regard himself as the victor if genocide and ethnic cleansing have been committed against Georgians? For this is a sin which is called a crime against mankind. Do not believe that the time of the supreme judgement before God, your own conscience and all the world will not come.

I therefore propose to you a meeting, a meeting with Vladislav Ardzinba, with the other leaders, with my old Abkhaz friends, both elderly and young: let us move away from the deadlock in the cause of a final reconciliation between our two peoples. I am deeply convinced that there is a need to wipe away the results of the war, to begin a new life. And it is we - the witnesses to the beginning of this terrible war, the witness to a thousand misfortunes - who must do this. I am ready to act, to act together with my colleagues and with the support of my entire people to revive the noble traditions of peace and coexistence.

9. And one more thing. My Abkhaz brothers, we are not alone. Peace between us and the settlement of the conflict are acknowledged as one of the main problems of the United Nations, the Russian Federation, the United States of America, France, the United Kingdom, Germany, the European security structures and the Commonwealth of Independent States, as well as of Ukraine and Turkey. The destroyed homes, roads and railways, the ruined villages and towns, need to be restored. Our friends have promised generous support if we can find sufficient political, indeed simply human, will to put out the fire which is still burning, to live as our great and wise ancestors taught us to live.

May God be with us.